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FEATURE: SOCIALLY ENGAGED BUDDHISM

Introduction: Reformulating "Socially Engaged Buddhism" as an Analytical Category

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(Guest Editors)

THE FIVE ESSAYS contained in this issue of *The Eastern Buddhist* address the theme of socially engaged Buddhism in new ways. Proceeding from early to late in their historical focus, Ji Zhe, Julia Huang, Kory Goldberg, and Hakamata Shun'ei (introduced and translated by Jonathan Watts) offer studies on new dimensions of Buddhist social engagement. Each reflects on how the term might be applied to specific persons and groups active after World War II. We will refer to these essays below, providing more detailed summaries at the end of this piece. Our own contribution proposes new parameters for the analytical use of this category.

We offer a revised definition of socially engaged Buddhism specifically tailored for scholarly use. This definition has emerged out of our respective studies of Buddhist movements active during the first half of the twentieth century in Japan and China, a historical period to which the label "socially engaged" is rarely applied.[1] Normally, scholars give this label to groups

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[1] Ip (2009a, pp. 148–52) considers similar phenomena in her discussion of the labels "humanistic Buddhism," and "engaged Buddhism," before settling on the language of "Buddhist activism" to examine specific prewar Chinese Buddhists' enactments of modernity. Ip

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founded after World War II that take traditional Buddhist beliefs, practices, and moral precepts and apply them to social projects such as "stopping war, promoting human rights, ministering to the victims of disease and disaster, and safeguarding the natural environment."[2] These groups are progressive and moral in ways expected of religion in the geopolitical and ideological situation of the postwar period,[3] one in which overtly nationalistic and political religion has been increasingly problematized. However, it should be mentioned that this trend is most true of liberal democratic and communist regimes, as there are cultural-nationalist forms of social engagement flourishing in specific Asian countries.

This revised definition allows us to construct a list—by no means exhaustive—of examples of advocates or organizers, beginning with the prewar period. As such, figures like Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837–1911), Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865–1898), Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭 (1872–1933), Khanh Hoa (1877–1947), Han Yongun 韓龍雲 (1879–1944), Takeuchi Ryō'on 武内了温 (1891–1968), and Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947) can be considered socially engaged in their rhetoric or practice.[4] Next come figures who came of age during the conflicts that wracked Asia in the middle of the twentieth century and hold global and postcolonial perspectives. The works of figures such as B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926), and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso, b. 1935), exhibit these perspectives, although

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helpfully notes that Chinese and Taiwanese forms have only been included under the rubric of socially engaged within the last decade (2009a, p. 150).

[2] Queen 2004, p. 248.

[3] One case that reveals the contours of these expectations is the Sōka Gakkai. Queen (1996a, pp. 3–4) relates how critics point to its wealth, political activities, exclusivity, proselytization, and the public image of its leader, Daisaku Ikeda 池田大作 (b. 1928), as somehow unseemly for an engaged Buddhist organization. See also Metraux (1996), Stone (2003), and McLaughlin (2012). McLaughlin (2012, pp. 56–58) presents a lucid discussion of secularist and opportunist opposition to Sōka Gakkai in the postwar period. In our definition, however, there is no barrier to considering types of moral reasoning or specific campaigns deployed by this large organization to be socially engaged.

[4] Prewar figures are identified less frequently. Goldfuss (2001) presents analysis of Yang's career, and Ip (2009a) discusses the pro-national and pro-capitalist ideologue, Tan—two early examples of socially engaged moral reasoning; Penwell (2013) introduces the thought and work of Watanabe in a recent conference presentation; DeVido (2009) discusses the Vietnamese Buddhist revival from the 1920s to the 1950s, in which Khanh was an active participant; Park (1998) identifies Han's "Buddhism for the masses" (K. *minjung pulgyo* 民眾佛教) as both socialist and socially engaged; Main (2012) surveys Takeuchi's thought and social work in the Japanese interwar period; Pittman (2001) describes Taixu as an "ethical pietist," referring to reasoning and activity congruent with social engagement.

we will only discuss Nhat Hanh in any detail below. The most familiar names are, of course, those active in the postwar period. Socially engaged Buddhists today are inspired by figures such as A. T. Ariyaratne (b. 1931), Sulak Sivaraksa (b. 1933), Zhengyan 證嚴 (b. 1937), Bernie Glassman (b. 1939), and Aung San Suu Kyi (b. 1945), to name a few.[5] Postwar figures are overwhelmingly involved in nonviolent activism or charitable work, either from outside the state establishment where they campaign for such things as peace, political rights, environmentalism, and freedom of religion, or in cooperation with the state establishment, organizing to respond to the massive human suffering caused by natural disaster and illness.

Our revised definition is an attempt to move away from two problems that affect scholarly analyses of this topic, namely the use of "socially engaged" as a term of moral praise and one restricted to nonviolent groups founded in the postwar period. First, we avoid uses of "socially engaged" as a term of moral praise indicating that a group is involved in projects of social betterment. Many Buddhist institutions add social projects to their primary practices, such as chanting, meditation, and care for the dead, but it is misleading to consider these supplementary projects engaged. Moreover, because ideas about which projects are good have changed over the course of the modern period, to praise a group with this term reveals more about the moral presuppositions of the labeler than the structural features of the group so labeled. Second, we apply "socially engaged" to groups that exhibit an underlying continuity in terms of their specific soteriology and moral reasoning regardless of whether they were active in the prewar or postwar, whether they are new, autonomous associations or subsections of established Buddhist groups. We do so despite the fact that prewar groups tend to be more nationalistic and less pacifist than later socially engaged Buddhism. Acknowledging this continuity between specific groups with opposing ideologies is a crucial preliminary step towards understanding what led one engaged group to support the nation and its military, and another to support world peace. To simply label the first "bad" and the second "good" does not answer this question. But we should say more

[5] See Schober (2005) and Houtman (1999). Houtman mentions the way that some political leaders viewed Burmese mental culture as itself a form of engaged Buddhism and outlines Aung San Suu Kyi's views of "active compassion." Some of the most recent figures have an online presence. See, for example, the list provided by Queen (2013, p. 527), the website of Bernie Glassman's Zen Peacemakers (http://zenpeacemakers.org/), or the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) founded by Sulak Sivaraksa, the Dalai Lama, and Thich Nhat Hanh (http://www.inebnetwork.org/) (Rothberg 1993).

about the nature of this continuity—the shared soteriology and moral reasoning which lie at the heart of our analysis.

For us, socially engaged Buddhism does not indicate a specific ideological framework or particular relation with the state. Rather, we argue that one of its central features is the rejection of the historical and ideological aspects of *secularization*, which relegate authentic religion to a position distant from political power.[6] Movements with a variety of modern ideological standpoints and political positions can possess a socially engaged soteriology in which social action is itself liberating. Each socio-political situation is complex, however, giving rise to nationalistic social engagement in some cases and pacifist engagement in others. Scholars of religion, observing the resurgence of religious movements and fundamentalisms around the world since the 1970s, began to question the classic secularization thesis, which predicted that religion would lose social significance in the process of modernization. José Casanova (1994) asserts that a modified version of the secularization thesis still applies to contemporary religion in the form of three independent processes: (1) the structural differentiation of secular spheres such as politics, economy, and science from the religious sphere; (2) the overall decline of religious practices and beliefs; and (3) the privatization of religion. Secularization is, for us, the exercise of power on the part of secular polities to distinguish between the secular and religious in ways that undermine the resources and moral legitimacy of religious actors within the secular—whether this exercise results in a modest relegation of religion to the realm of civil society (apart from the state but still tolerated in the public sphere and public sector), or whether it results in a bold relegation of religion to the private sphere (where any public manifestation of religious activity is subject to suppression). Socially engaged Buddhism is the *mirror image* of secularization, and will view social action within the "secular," as it is structured by a given polity, to be essentially religious and fundamental to awakening. And, interestingly, it will view action within the "religious," as structured by a given polity, to be non-essential.[7]

[6] Although they take approaches different from our own, others are beginning to intervene in the field of socially engaged Buddhism. Soucy (2014), in a recent conference presentation, explains the idea of "exteriority" while Temprano (2012, 2014) reconsiders the positions of scholars with respect to questions of authenticity.

[7] We hold that any view which gives primacy to interior practice is different from social engagement. Although S. B. King (2013, p. 166) critiques the view that one must become enlightened oneself before one seeks to help others, she does not pursue this critique in other cases. For example, she describes (2013, pp. 164–65) as "engaged" views in which social

We argue that Buddhist social engagement is a modern phenomenon that relies on a particular form of moral reasoning, one which resonates with some of the axioms of liberation theology;[8] this reasoning depicts society as *fundamentally unjust* and in need of change, social ills as *systemic* and in need of *systematic* solutions, social activity *itself as Buddhist practice*,[9] and positions religious moral action within the putatively "secular" sphere of the modern nation-state. We classify social engagement as one kind of Buddhist modernity[10] in which Buddhist soteriology is explicitly connected to social action, such "that working for social betterment in and of itself constitutes an essential part of Buddhist practice."[11] To put this definition in plain language, for socially engaged Buddhists, there can be no authentic Buddhism without ethical action that continuously attempts to change the nature of society.

The essays contained in this issue provide examples of this socially engaged moral reasoning. Goldberg, in his discussion of contemporary

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action follows naturally upon meditative achievement, where we would not. The particular reasoning of social engagement prioritizes social action, leaving interior practice in a variety of relations with it (identical, consequent, contingent, supporting, or even unnecessary). In Sivaraksa's words: "But meditation alone is not sufficient—because people suffer so much. One must also act; one must do what one can" (Rothberg 1993). Action is essential.

[8] Especially in the way that liberation theology sees oppression and inequality in society, and seeks to proclaim god "in a world that is inhumane" (quoting Gustavo Gutiérrez, Rowland 2007, p. 3); one labors as a form of religious practice to change that inhumane world, and views the state of society and the achievement of religious goals as inseparable (Chaouch 2012). See also Queen's (1996b) discussion of B. R. Ambedkar's presentation of Buddhism as a "hermeneutics of liberation."

[9] S. B. King (2013, p. 167) discusses this understanding of social work as inseparable from awakening practice, including a quote from the Ariyaratne's Sarvodaya Sramadana: "we build the road and the road builds us." See S. B. King (2005, pp. 39–41) for further discussion of "self-transformation through work" with reference to both Sarvodaya and Ciji.

[10] To suggest that social engagement is one type of Buddhist modernity, of course, is to open up the question of other types. Buddhism as a "spirituality" or private practice flourishes within the limitations imposed upon religion by secularism, and can be seen as another type. The "mindfulness movement," in which Buddhism exists as a scientifically verifiable "technique" shorn of its religious and institutional overtones, can be seen as yet another (see Wilson 2014). McMahan's (2008) book provides a lucid overview of Buddhist modernism.

[11] Stone 2003, p. 66. For descriptions of socially engaged Buddhism as comprising new movements, with new institutional structures and charismatic leadership, see Queen (1996a, pp. 1–2, 6). It is not surprising that movements within established Buddhist institutions will not look to a new charismatic leader, but back to the original founder. Thus, a substitute for living charismatic leadership is found in the retelling of founder stories, where stories of Nichiren or Dōgen, for example, provide the same unifying and inspiring example as stories of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Zhengyan, or Sulak Sivaraksa.

socially engaged pilgrimage to Bodhgayā, describes the sense among socially engaged pilgrims that Bihari society is unjust and in desperate need of change to address poverty, corruption, caste-based conflict, and "the notorious failures of the Bihari government, to provide adequate education, food, medicine, clothing, and in some cases shelter."[12] Hakamata, in his work to reduce suicide, clearly views society-with-suicide as unjust.[13] He gestures towards an ideal society[14] with that injustice removed, in part, by Buddhist social work. This ideal society is, in some fundamental sense, a Buddhist society. Both, too, reveal a diagnosis of social ills as systemic and in need of systematic solutions. Hakamata, for example, describes "isolation" as the "illness of modern society" that leads to suicide, a systemic phenomenon caused by the progress of capitalism and rural depopulation. Goldberg describes the view that "enlightened education" provided by Buddhist schools "will transform society at its roots."[15] In terms of viewing social activity as itself Buddhist practice, Goldberg's pilgrims view the programs such as "primary and secondary schools, meditation retreats, health clinics, self-help groups, micro-lending schemes, and vocational training centers" as "essential for personal, social, and spiritual transformation."[16] Indeed, in one view, the Buddhist doctrine of no-self might only be realized fully in the form of social action because these activities enable "direct, embodied, and experiential understanding."[17] And last, in terms of continuous efforts to change society, Ji quotes Taixu's ideal of a Buddhism that "tries to reform society, so as to bring progress to humankind and advance the world."[18]

We seek to build upon the excellent work of the contributors to this issue, and the ongoing work of scholars such as Sallie B. King and Christopher Queen, but recommend modified criteria. What is similar among "socially

[12] See Goldberg's article, p. 96, below.

[13] When socially engaged Buddhists address the environment, too, their rhetoric shifts the emphasis to the effect of human society on the world around us, using the language of "polluting," "harmful," and "unsustainable" rather than "unjust."

[14] Hakamata describes the ideal society—one without suicide—in the section "The Effect of Structural Change on Local Culture" (pp. 86–90, below). Like Ariyaratne's Sarvodaya Sramadana, Hakamata's ideal society is entangled with a romantic vision of premodern, precapitalist village society. For Hakamata, the ideal village enjoys bonds of solidarity, trust, mutual work and care, and moderation of desire. It would be worth investigating the extent of romantic and pastoral longings in socially engaged moral reasoning, especially in the case of groups that focus on rural, environmental, and development issues.

[15] Goldberg, p. 106, below.

[16] Ibid., p. 96.

[17] Ibid., p. 100.

[18] Ji, p. 36, below.

engaged" groups is not a particular political position, form of activism, or type of leadership or organization (as S. B. King, Queen, and Ji would assert), but a form of moral reasoning, soteriology, and resistance to secularism—that is, resistance to the modern tendency to restrict religion to the private sphere, even to the point of constraining religion to the interior experience of individuals. As mentioned above, this allows social engagement to be found in certain prewar Buddhist groups, and in some which collaborated closely with the nation-state. The prewar Chinese reformer Taixu, for example, is not normally himself labeled an "engaged Buddhist" despite having a key influence on Vietnamese, Korean, and Taiwanese engaged Buddhist groups—especially on Nhat Hanh. Postwar groups differ from Taixu in that they possess a nearly universal nonviolent and pacifist orientation, and are connected with postwar global peace movements. Although Taixu and other Chinese monk-reformers stressed the idea of world peace, they cannot be called pacifists. They were similar to postwar movements, however, in the moral reasoning embodied in the language of "humanistic Buddhism," and all have been, or desired to be, active in the secular sphere of the nation-state. Ji's essay in this issue has great value in that it grapples with the question of Taixu's engagement and analyzes the structural features of how he, Nhat Hanh, and others position their institutions and social activities vis-à-vis the nation-state.

Our definition of social engagement departs from previous scholarship insofar as we argue that an analytical definition should be detached from particular forms of ethical action, such as charity, and from specific ideological commitments, such as pacifism. Instead, it should be understood as the performance of action—typically collective or group action—in the public and often political sectors of the modern nation-state. Socially engaged Buddhists are marked by their view of these spheres of society as *legitimate and natural* locations for Buddhist action, itself seen as morally good and of benefit to society as a whole. What distinguishes these groups, then, is precisely their resistance (sometimes unconscious) to the aggressive attempt of secularism and the secular state to restrict religion to the private sphere. Further, we argue that the category should not apply to all socially "active" groups. In other words, performing relief work or charity should not,[19] in

[19] In fact, some socially engaged rhetoric will offer a critique of charity. S. B. King (2013, p. 164) explains that the condescension inherent in charity is ameliorated by understanding the doctrine of no-self: there is no giver; there is no receiver. In this kind of rhetoric, charitable giving must be performed from a Buddhist standpoint in order to avoid its hierarchical and oppressive nature.

the absence of additional criteria, define a group as socially engaged. This is because Buddhist altruism relies on a different and less specialized form of moral reasoning—even if the concrete provision of food, clothing, and shelter in both altruism and social engagement happens to be the same.[20] "Benefitting the other" is the same in both, but social engagement limits the locations, methods, and overarching narrative for this other-benefitting action. A focus on moral reasoning delimits the category to those groups that view social action performed within the secular sphere as the indispensable form of religious practice. And moreover, a focus on the way in which socially engaged Buddhism counters secularist ideologies, expands the category to include a larger range of Buddhist groups—from those earlier in the twentieth century to sub-groups found within older, established Buddhist institutions. This revised definition allows scholars to see the closest cousins of this historically recent national and transnational movement, not in examples of premodern altruism, but in the Buddhist modernist, revivalist, and nationalist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[21]

To illustrate a few features of our revised definition, we will take a closer look at the early writings of the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, to highlight the ways that he embodies the continuity between prewar and postwar socially engaged Buddhism. Next, as an example of resistance to secularism typical of socially engaged Buddhism, we discuss the political struggles of the Chinese reformer, Taixu, and Chinese student-monks active during the first half of the twentieth century. These actors attempted to create the conditions for, and to legitimate, Buddhist social action. And, as an example of moral reasoning typical of socially engaged Buddhism, we turn to the proposals for social work within the Ōtani-ha Shin Buddhist administration by the Japanese priest, Takeuchi Ryō'on, who was active from the 1920s to the 1960s. Takeuchi's thought demonstrates the way that this reasoning differs from basic altruism. Lastly, to bring our discussion up to

[20] See Huang's discussion of how the generalized idea of Buddhist monetary giving and its associated practices relate to the more specific and directed fundraising of the Ciji Foundation; see Goldberg's assertion, following Queen, that engagement is different from altruism (p. 98, below). Although Goldberg distinguishes social engagement and altruism at the analytical level, he describes the way that pilgrims imagine their social action changes society through common schema and concepts from Buddhist ethics (p. 97, below). In his field studies, too, the more specific forms of engaged action rely on generalized Buddhist ideas of altruism and ethical action.

[21] Ji, too, sees engaged Buddhism not as a result of 1960s anti-war movements but as rooted in prewar Buddhist reform movements (p. 35, n. 1, below).

the present day, we introduce in more detail the essays contained in this issue by Ji on the career of Zhao Puchu 趙朴初 (1907–2000) in the People's Republic of China, Huang on the nature of transnational Ciji 慈濟 networks in Malaysia and the United States during the 1990s and early 2000s, Watt's introduction and translation of Hakamata on a socially engaged Buddhist response to the problem of suicide in contemporary Japan, and Goldberg on foreign pilgrims to Bodhgayā in contemporary India.

Current Scholarly Definitions of Social Engagement

In the last decades of the twentieth century, scholar-activists and others[22] working on Buddhist ethics began to pay close attention to the social activities of modern Buddhist individuals and groups. The challenge for scholars was—and remains—to devise a model that clearly links these "otherwise independent, globally dispersed movements."[23] Queen defines socially engaged Buddhism as "the rise of political activism and social service by Buddhist communities and organizations in Asia and the West since the 1950s,"[24] a "relatively new" movement that stresses "nonviolent activism."[25] In his view, this Buddhism is applied to society in ways that are nonviolent, progressive, and critical of power. This Buddhism involves the reinterpretation of teachings and practices in novel ways.[26] Additionally, he asserts that engaged Buddhist organizations themselves tend to be new, grassroots groups that do not conform to older sectarian boundaries and which are often founded, led, or inspired by charismatic leaders.[27]

[22] Although they were not the first scholars to take up the term, Sallie B. King and Christopher Queen forged the academic study of socially engaged Buddhism. They have numerous publications, including key edited volumes (Queen and S. B. King 1996; Queen 2000; Queen, Prebish, and Keown 2003), and S. B. King's recent monographs (2005, 2009). Queen's argument has developed over time and he recently identifies the reinterpretation of Buddhist ideas and practices according to a "collective or social perspective" to be a core component of socially engaged Buddhism (Queen 2013, p. 531). We agree and seek to build upon his insight, seeing this perspective on social problems and systematic solutions to be characteristic.

[23] Queen 2013, p. 525.

[24] Queen 2005, p. 2785.

[25] Queen 2004, p. 248.

[26] See, for example, Goldberg's discussion of novel deployments of the divine abodes (Skt. *brahma-vihāra*) by socially engaged pilgrims (pp. 110–11, below).

[27] The study of engaged Buddhism itself is relatively new, with the majority of publications appearing after 1990 (Eppsteiner 1988; Kraft 1992; W. L. King 1994; Queen and S. B. King 1996; Tanaka and Nasu 1998; Strain 1998; Queen 2000; S. B. King 2000; Queen, Prebish,

There are two ideological features that most scholarship of socially engaged Buddhism insists upon: (1) nonviolence and (2) independence from the nation-state. Queen (2003), for example, dismisses Buddhist projects associated with the nation-state and S. B. King (2009) insists on nonviolence as the key feature. Here, socially engaged groups are closer to "the people" than to "the state" and are, at most, critics of state action. Indeed, according to these scholars, engaged Buddhists are supposed to be suspicious of the nation-state, especially when that state is involved in the use of force; they view all other Buddhist forms as merely co-opted by the state.[28] In his essay, Ji contemplates precisely this dividing line between criticism and co-optation, and concludes that although Zhao speaks the language of social engagement, he is "a collaborationist" and cannot be considered an engaged Buddhist.[29] There is little discussion of older groups displaying social engagement, such as the established (Jp. *kisei* 既成) Buddhist schools and sects in Japan—an oversight which Ranjana Mukhopadhyaya (2005), Stephen Covell (2005), and John Nelson (2013) have begun to address.[30]

Towards the "Analytical"; Away from the "Moral"

Because it is considered good to be concerned with society and actively involved in its improvement, "social engagement" is often used to signify the general claim that Buddhism influences the world in morally good ways, or to indicate a Buddhist group's active involvement in contemporary social issues. It is crucial to assert that we do not use it as a term of moral praise in either sense. Instead, we explore the term as an analytical category for

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and Keown 2003; Queen 2003; S. B. King 2005; Queen 2005; Rothberg 2006; S. B. King 2009; Ip 2009a and 2009b). See also the bibliographies compiled by Rothberg (2004) and Queen (2005). In Japanese, see the work of Ama (2003) and Mukhopadhyaya (2005).

[28] Juliane Schober, for example, divides Burmese Buddhism into two halves. One is "the nationalist, centralized, and ritualistic patronage of Buddhism" by the state which uses "large-scale rituals to legitimate a political hierarchy of the state," and the other is "the *socially engaged Buddhism* advocated by Aung San Suu Kyi that emphasized personal, social engagement, ethics," and meditation, and resists "spiritual and material exploitation by the state" (Schober 2005, pp. 113–14; emphasis added).

[29] Ji, pp. 38, 42, below.

[30] There are still few theoretical models of engaged Buddhism in Japan. Mukhopadhyaya (2005) proposes a four-fold typology of nationalization, socialization, popularization, and internationalization into which she places groups that span the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Her typology is especially important for scholars examining social engagement because it allows her to link postwar groups to prewar ones, showing the ways that engagement has shifted over time. See also John Nelson's (2013) recent work.

use by scholars of modern Buddhism. An analytical category has as its goal, not the identification of the authentic or the moral, but the explanation of significant trends within the broad phenomena of modern Buddhism.[31] A good category will answer questions about the nature and structure of social movements and how they change over time. Specifically, our category is crafted to explain how it is that—despite deeply conflicting ideologies—certain nationalist and anti-establishment Buddhist forms in the twentieth century are so similar to one another in activity and rhetoric.

The frequent use of "socially engaged" as a label of moral praise and authenticity, however, alerts us to the delicate set of issues that impinge on the values of living Buddhists. There is a careful balance to be struck between what religious actors and groups claim about themselves, and the analytical categories that scholars apply to them.[32] Neither should be subordinated to the other. So, how should scholars understand concerns about authenticity and originality that constantly appear in debates over whether socially engaged Buddhism is old or new?[33] In this essay, although we privilege the analytical approach, we understand claims of authenticity and originality made for socially engaged Buddhism as "embedded": an embedded argument is meant to have rhetorical force, to persuade others. They are effective rhetorical and motivational strategies necessary to establish cohesion and identity for engaged Buddhist groups, and are prompted by the position of religion in modernity. That is, these claims are deeply woven into the very existence of socially engaged groups.

Because modernity projects religion backwards in time, modern Buddhist embedded arguments will always look back to premodern sources of

[31] Although Bodhi (2009) remains concerned with authenticity in his category of the postmodern, his definition of social engagement is close to our own in several important ways. Distinguishing social engagement from other types of Buddhism, he stresses not the attempt to change or affect society (which is shared by many types), but the "application" of Buddhism in the modern historical context to instigate "systemic changes in social, political, and economic institutions" (Bodhi 2009, p. 2). For Bodhi, this represents a shift in Buddhist goals away from internal cultivation to the external knowledge and technique necessary to change systems and institutions (2009, pp. 3, 15).

[32] Birnbaum (2009, p. 26), for example, chooses to avoid declaring an "authentic" socially engaged Buddhism in deference to living Buddhist social actors, and pursues instead a model of social engagement "contained in a core set of Mahayana sutras."

[33] This continual appearance of the "old" versus "new" debate bears much in common with another dichotomy spawned by modernity, "traditional" versus "modern." See Yarnall's use of the dichotomy of "traditionist" and "modernist" to examine socially engaged Buddhism (Yarnall 2003), and Temprano's (2012) critique.

authenticity for rhetorical force—and thus new things will always be portrayed as old. It is a maneuver integral to prescriptive arguments found within modern religious traditions and among their practitioners, although it is by no means exclusive to them. Engaged Buddhists must portray what is an innovative approach to practice, not as innovative, but as original. What is this innovative approach? It is one in which the modern techniques of social and political action are defined *as Buddhist practices* with soteriological value. This means that charitable work or anti-war activism is socially engaged when that activism itself directly expresses the highest goals of Buddhism as a religion. Because engaged groups incorporate modern social and charitable work as practice, they must make two claims. First, they must claim that these novel activities are both authentic and venerable. This normally appears in arguments that Buddhism has been engaged with society from its very beginning[34]—often portraying the Buddha himself as engaged—either in intent or actuality. Second, they must distinguish themselves from other Buddhist movements that do not share their innovative approach to practice. Most often this is accomplished via a historical claim that Buddhist engagement has been suppressed by internal corruption or external oppression, and thus engagement must be found anew through reform and increased social activity.[35] Thich Nhat Hanh uses both of these strategies in his 1967 work, *Vietnam: The Lotus in the Sea of Fire*, to which we turn here.

Thich Nhat Hanh's Early Vision of Social Engagement

One particular Buddhist, the Vietnamese monk and activist Thich Nhat Hanh, has been the prototypical socially engaged Buddhist in the eyes of both activists and scholars. In fact, most scholarly introductions begin with Nhat Hanh, the 1960s, and the war in Vietnam,[36] or with the 1963 self-immolation of one of his contemporaries, Thich Quang Duc (1897–1963).[37] Nhat Hanh can be seen—as Queen does—as a champion of nonviolence, as applying Buddhist teachings to global society in novel ways, and as a charismatic leader who

[34] See Ji on Zhao's claim that Renjian Buddhism was "already present in early Buddhism" (p. 42, below).

[35] Goldberg reports that "many engaged pilgrims and local activists" are critical of using funds to build Buddhist memorial sites and temples when these lack a social function (p. 104, n. 26, below).

[36] See also Ji's contribution to this issue (pp. 35–58, below).

[37] Rothberg 2006, p. ix; W. L. King 1994, p. 14; Ama 2003.

has inspired new groups. Nhat Hanh even introduced the term "engaged Buddhism" into English vernacular discourse during the 1960s. Since then, the term has slowly circulated and been taken up by other Buddhist activists and organizers.[38] Although many aspects of Nhat Hanh's life, thought, and organizational style seem to embody the key features of widely accepted current scholarly definitions of social engagement, what is both curious and telling is the way that Nhat Hanh's own view diverges from them. Few scholars mention the fact that Nhat Hanh sees himself as continuing an earlier movement that began prior to the 1950s or that this earlier movement was inspired by the Buddhist reform movement in China and closely tied to Vietnamese Buddhist nationalism.[39] Fewer still identify the nature of this continuity. He refers to the Chinese Buddhist reformer, Taixu, by name, identifying him as a source of inspiration for the social reform aspects of the Vietnamese Buddhist revival of the 1920s and 1930s.[40] It is, in fact, the rejection of nationalism in the postwar academy, and the deep geopolitical and ideological differences between 1930s Buddhist revivalism and 1960s anti-war activism, that obscure what Nhat Hanh sees as an essential continuity. A close reading of how Nhat Hanh defines "engaged Buddhism" will illustrate this point.

Throughout *Lotus in the Sea of Fire*, Nhat Hanh makes two arguments that we believe are typical of socially engaged rhetoric: he rejects "disengaged" Buddhism, either as a false stereotype or as the result of political oppression; and, he posits "engaged" Buddhism as its authentic and original form. In other words, he argues that authentic Buddhism is always engaged in society.

Nhat Hanh responds to a pervasive and negative view of Buddhism as "detached" from society (or "in the mountain," to use his words). Buddhism has been criticized in many ways over its long history, including an enduring view of Buddhist monks as "parasitic" in China, but what is important here is the confluence of factors that brought this particular iteration of the

[38] Thich Nhat Hanh 1967. See for example Sulak Sivaraksa's writings from the late 1980s onward. Queen (1996a, p. 34, n. 6) briefly traces the use of the terms "engaged" and "socially engaged" in English. Nhat Hanh states that he first proposed the idea of engaged Buddhism earlier, in a series of newspaper articles and essays beginning in 1954 (2008a, p. 30). In 1964, his term for engaged Buddhism was "Buddhism entering into society or social life" (V. *Dao Phat di vao cuoc doi*; 2008a, p. 31).

[39] For descriptions of modern Vietnamese Buddhism that trace this earlier movement and its impact, see Ji in this issue and DeVido (2007, 2009).

[40] Thich Nhat Hanh 1967, p. 50.

criticism to the forefront of modern public discourse and that compelled a response from modern Buddhists attempting to justify social action. This view of Buddhism as detached or disengaged was widely held and expressed in contemptuous fashion by Christian missionaries, government officials, and even by Buddhists themselves. Ji, for example, relates Taixu's assertion that "a modern Buddhism must base itself not on 'ghosts' (Ch. *gui* 鬼) and 'death' (Ch. *si* 死)—that is to say, ideas of the afterworld and the performance of funerary services."[41] In both China and Japan, for instance, monks and nuns were seen, and continue to be seen, as parasites who do not contribute useful labor to society but instead exploit the people, profiting from irrational and expensive rituals and funerary rites.[42] They are thought parasitic in the modern sense of neglecting civic duty and persisting in unscientific action. Buddhism was portrayed by its critics as superstitious, irrational, useless, and corrupt.[43] Nhat Hanh responds to this critique by arguing that Buddhism was disengaged and otherworldly only when it had been deformed by external pressures, such as colonialism. If the Vietnamese Buddhism of the early twentieth century was moribund, he argues, it was the result of French colonial interference and not a state natural to Buddhism itself.[44]

This negative stereotype of Buddhism is endemic to the modern period. It arose as a fusion of Christian, colonial, scientistic, and nationalistic polemics. Moreover, this stereotype has appeared in the political discourse of various Asian nations. Often, it has been part of an aggressive secularism that appropriated the material, moral, and political capital of Buddhist institutions.[45] Although there is also a scholarly discourse that paints Buddhism as disengaged, apolitical, and "otherworldly" (famously ascribed to Max Weber[46]), we are more interested in the responses of Buddhists to the tangi-

[41] Ji, p. 36, below.

[42] Covell 2005, Lai 2013, Nedostup 2009.

[43] In modern Japan, Buddhists have persistently felt the need to respond to the "funeral Buddhism" critique. In modern China, they strove to respond to the criticism that Buddhism was parasitic and idle (see Ji's essay in this issue). Kraft (1992, p. 3) lists a number of early modern and modern criticisms of Buddhism as "disengaged." We discuss this component of socially engaged rhetoric further below.

[44] Thich Nhat Hanh 1967.

[45] For the early twentieth century deployments of this critique see, for example, Josephson (2006) on the anti-Buddhist campaigns and the response of the Japanese Buddhist reformer Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919); or Duara (1991) on the economy of anti-religion campaigns of Chinese reformers involved with the emergent nation-state.

[46] Weber's view of Buddhism was complex (Gellner 2009, p. 52), but the strawman attributed to Weber appears constantly in recent works touching on Buddhism and society. Weber also famously declares Buddhism to be apolitical in *The Religion of India*: "Ancient Bud-

ble political and economic impact of secularism and the way that modernity itself—by projecting religion into an imagined, traditional past—makes secularism seem natural. In this latter sense, Buddhists have always had to manage the fear of being unsuited to modern society. This is why Taixu fiercely rejected Buddhism's perceived disengagement in the prewar period, and why Nhat Hanh argues against it in the postwar period. This fear of being unsuited to modernity was keenly felt by Buddhists acting in society, and for this reason, became characteristic of Buddhist reform movements throughout nineteenth and early twentieth century Asia that justified Buddhist social action. By attacking this stereotype, and the very real marginalization of Buddhist institutions that it enabled,[47] Taixu and Nhat Hanh set the stage for replacing this "false" Buddhism with what each viewed as its authentic version. For Nhat Hanh, authentic Buddhism is legitimately enmeshed in society and ought to retain or even expand its institutional capital—precisely because its effect on society would be morally desirable.

Nhat Hanh argues that, far from being otherworldly, Buddhism has *always been* engaged in social action:[48]

> So the Buddha is not in the mountain. He is considered to be in everyone, so that the peace and well-being of the whole people require that every Buddhist should fulfill his responsibility to the community while not neglecting his inner life.[49]

Here we have a new paradigm for action—performing social service as Buddhist practice—which is portrayed as authentic and original, thus always there. In our view, responses like Nhat Hanh's are "engaged" when they attempt to preserve society as a legitimate sphere of action for Buddhists, often by claiming that such action is quintessentially Buddhist. Nhat Hanh

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dhism represents in almost all, practically decisive points the characteristic polar opposite of Confucianism as well as of Islam. It is a specifically unpolitical and anti-political status religion, more precisely, a religious 'technology' of wandering and of intellectually-schooled mendicant monks. Like all Indian philosophy and theology it is a 'salvation religion,' if one is to use the name 'religion' for an ethical movement without a deity and without a cult" (Weber [1916] 1958, p. 206).

[47] It is important to note that Buddhism's sense of itself as embattled did not mean that among religious groups it suffered the most. Chinese popular religious sites, for example, were confiscated to a much larger degree. For more on this Chinese Buddhist self-image in the early twentieth century, see Lai 2013.

[48] Jones (2012), in his overview of socially engaged Buddhism, presents the same argument as Nhat Hanh; he points out that Buddhism is falsely seen as withdrawn from the world, but, in truth, it has always been engaged.

[49] Thich Nhat Hanh 1967, p. 18.

argues that active concern for suffering in the world is the natural expression of Buddhist cultivation.[50] He explains that the modern form of this natural expression is found in the Buddhist activities to alleviate suffering and develop society that emerged during the revival of Vietnamese Buddhism in the 1930s—part anti-colonial enterprise and part inspiration by the "renovation of Buddhism in China led by the great Chinese monk Thai-Hu [Taixu]."[51] In both China and Vietnam, the revival consisted of new, modern study groups and associations, with their own recognizably modern periodicals and pamphlets (different from the treatises and commentaries of the Buddhist past). It also included a youth movement heavily involved in education and social welfare.[52]

The very first time Nhat Hanh uses the term "engaged Buddhism," it is with reference to the prewar revival. He clearly sees his activities in the 1960s as a continuation of this revival: "In the 1930s the Buddhist scholars had already discussed the engagement of Buddhism in the modern society and called it *nhan gian Phat Giao*[53] or 'engaged Buddhism.'"[54] Further, Nhat Hanh links this prewar engaged Buddhism with formations and behaviors that, according to Queen and S. B. King, it is not supposed to exhibit, such as nationalism and political involvement. He notes the close ties of the prewar Buddhist revival with Vietnamese nationalism,[55] and describes the establishment of the Unified Buddhist Church in relation to political events, following on the fall of the Diem regime in the 1960s. Lastly, he highlights the continued efforts of youth groups[56] in Saigon to "'actualize' (V. *hien dai hoa*) Buddhism" and how they mobilized "the potential force of their religion to rebuild their society and consequently have carried Buddhism into every domain of life: culture, economics, politics, social welfare."[57] The

[50] Thich Nhat Hanh 1967, pp. 9–11, 18.

[51] Thich Nhat Hanh 1967, p. 50. See DeVido (2007, 2009) for further discussion of how Taixu influenced the Vietnamese Buddhist revival and Thich Nhat Hanh's conception of engaged Buddhism.

[52] In 1964, continuing earlier youth initiatives, Nhat Hanh set up the School of Youth for Social Service, which trained lay and monastic youth as social workers, dispatching them to help rebuild rural villages, educate children, set up dispensaries and cooperatives, and so on (Thich Nhat Hanh 2008a, p. 35).

[53] A translation of "Buddhism for the human [world]" (Ch. *renjian fojiao* 人間佛教).

[54] Thich Nhat Hanh 1967, p. 52.

[55] Ibid., pp. 52, 56.

[56] Through a "School of Youth for Social Service" at the newly founded (1964) Van Hanh University (Ibid., p. 58).

[57] Ibid., p. 56.

Vietnamese term that Nhat Hanh translates as "actualize" literally means "to modernize." This general idea can be compared to the desire to "Buddhicize" (Ch. *fohua* 佛化) one's society and the whole world, which was extremely popular among Chinese Buddhist reformers in the early twentieth century.[58] Nhat Hanh's support of this goal to remake society using Buddhism, a goal commonly held by socially engaged leaders, is strongly anti-secularist. This is not Buddhism as a private, spiritual practice; this is Buddhism deliberately performed throughout all spheres of society.

It is only in the later part of what Nhat Hanh views as a continuous development that the particular constellation of ideological features which scholars consider characteristic of socially engaged Buddhism as a whole appeared: In a post-World War II context of civil war and regime change in 1960s Vietnam, it became socially progressive, apolitical, anti-war, and nonviolent.[59] Moreover, it became postcolonial, globally-minded, ecumenical, and critical of ruling establishments. What this set of features excludes is the revivalist and nationalist Vietnamese Buddhism of the 1930s[60] with its goal of recreating society—the period when, according to Nhat Hanh, the term "engaged" was first being used.

Whether they were conservative, nationalist, anti-establishment, or pacifist, these prewar and postwar movements have more in common with each other than they do with any example of premodern Buddhist altruism. For Nhat Hanh writing in 1967, the prewar and postwar movements are both "engaged." Like Nhat Hanh, we see no obstacle to considering as "socially engaged" Buddhist movements that are revivalist, nationalistic, or socialist, if they specifically focus on social action within society as the primary form of religious practice. For Nhat Hanh, it is not nonviolence per se that is the key feature of engagement (although there is no question that it is absolutely

[58] Lai 2013.

[59] S. B. King (2009, chapter 4) takes nonviolence as a core characteristic, and discusses the pervasive influence of Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948): "It should be very clear that groups and individuals who violate the norm of nonviolent words and deeds cannot be considered to be Engaged Buddhists" (S. B. King 2009, p. 26).

[60] There are other examples viewed as somewhat socially engaged but often with ambivalence or criticism: early and mid-twentieth century Buddhist activist Walpola Rahula (1907–1997) argued strongly for monastic participation in politics and society as he viewed "service to others" as the essence of Buddhism (Queen and S. B. King 1996, pp. 14–17). He contributed as well to the growth of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism and is criticized by Tambiah (1992, pp. 18–30) and Queen (1996a, p. 19). B. R. Ambedkar, as well, was supportive of military service during World War II (Fitzgerald 1999, pp. 89–90). Taixu was said to support military service for monks (Yu 2005, chapter 4), and so on.

central to the Buddhism he espouses), but rather the programmatic efforts to remake and reform every aspect of society.

Criteria for Inclusion: Anti-secular and Active in Public Life

In the next two sections, we present a few examples from our research on modern Buddhism in China and Japan to further illustrate the key features of our definition of socially engaged Buddhism.

In our first example, we discuss the way Chinese reformers and student-monks worked to create better citizens, support the nation and defend it when necessary, teach dharma to prisoners, care for orphans, and minister to other disadvantaged social groups.[61] These Chinese Buddhists in the early twentieth century shared, according to our redefinition of Buddhist social engagement, a moral reasoning, soteriology, and resistance to secularism common among engaged Buddhists in both the pre- and postwar periods. In the case of China, however, secularization did not lead to the "privatization" of Buddhism, but to its regulation and institutionalization. In order to assert themselves as active participants in a project they deemed not only beneficial but necessary for the survival of both Buddhism and the nation, Chinese reformist Buddhists had to first fight for entry into the public sphere, against the opposition of the state and regulated Buddhist institutions.

Lai argues that the student-monks, whose identities were produced by a newly modernized Buddhist education system, can be seen as "engaged citizens."[62] When we focus on social action as religious practice in the secular sphere (which meant both the public and political spheres of the modern Chinese nation-state), and when we avoid categorization based on specific political or ideological commitments, these student-monks and reformers can be considered socially engaged Buddhists. In fact, the groups that can be included are surprisingly diverse and display a range of orientations to the nation-state: from explicitly political, even nationalist, to explicitly apolitical. The important element is that these orientations are *enabling* of specific secular actions. Expressing political commitments enables Buddhist groups to participate in the secular sphere of the nation-state—or to critique it. In order to protect the ability of Chinese Buddhists to act in the secular sphere, for example, a struggle to control property and gain legal and political rights was required. In other cases, avoiding political com-

[61] Pitman 2001, pp. 102–4; Lai 2013; Yu 2005.
[62] Lai 2013.

mitments and legal struggles enables Buddhist groups to cross national boundaries and act transnationally—as in the case of the postwar Ciji.[63] But in all cases, these groups are "engaged" because they do not acknowledge a boundary between their religious lives and secular action.

Talal Asad argues that "secularization" does not describe a universal or natural process, but one in which the very notion of the secular itself emerged from the specific geographical and historical contexts of modern Western Europe.[64] Where, then, does that leave the nation-states of Asia? According to Asad, the "secular" was already embedded in the ideological framework that was transmitted to the non-Western world as a result of colonization. As a political ideology in Asia, then, religion and the secular have been mutually constitutive. This last point is especially relevant to our understanding of modern China where "religion" became an indispensable space in the formation of the modern nation-state. In China, the differentiation of the religious from the secular sphere required the invention of "religion" as a political category. Secularization at the dawn of the twentieth century in China can be seen as a "dual movement of distinction and intervention,"[65] in which "religion" (*zongjiao* 宗教) and "superstition" (*mixin* 迷信) as legitimate categories in political discourse were created, a move which had serious repercussions for political as well as religious life.[66] For those Buddhists who promoted social engagement, this required entry into this movement of secularization, marked by continuous tension and negotiation between state and religious actors.

[63] One of the most interesting apolitical groups that many recognize as socially engaged is Ciji (or Tzu Chi) which has an explicit commitment to remain politically neutral. All members, in fact, take a precept to refrain from political participation, including civil disobedience: "Do not participate in politics or demonstrations" (Tzu Chi USA Website, http://www.us.tzuchi.org/; Huang 2009, p. 75). In one well-known symbolic example, Ye Jinchuan 葉金川, Taiwan's former Minister of Health and Ciji member of long standing, publically declared that he stopped wearing his Ciji tie when he became a politician because Ciji "does not participate in politics" (http://news.cts.com.tw/udn/international/200908/200908040297158.html). For more information about the social and public-sector activities of the Ciji, see Laliberté 2004 and Huang 2009.

[64] Asad 1993, 2003.

[65] Szonyi 2009, p. 317. The recent works of Ashiwa and Wank (2009), Goossaert and Palmer (2011), Ji (2008), and Nedostup (2009) mark an important step towards a more nuanced understanding of secularization as it applies to China.

[66] Ashiwa 2009, Duara 1995, Nedostup 2009. See also Josephson (2012) who outlines a similar process for the Japanese nation-state.

The state had to first distinguish religion from superstition before attempting to reconstitute and regulate religious life; its aim was to make religion beneficial to the nation-building project.[67] According to this top-down model, a religion ought to be purely a spiritual and ethical tradition, well-organized under its respective national association, and useful to the modernization project of the state.[68] This caused socially engaged Buddhist leaders such as Taixu to advocate a "Humanistic Buddhism" which went against the idea that religion ought to be purely a spiritual tradition. Yet, this "Humanistic Buddhism" was formulated in such a way that allowed it to be cooperative and supportive of the state's modernization and so enter and act in the secular sphere.

Taixu is well known for his contribution to the modernization of Chinese Buddhism, but it is also important to note here the ways that he rejected secularism. In a perfect example of how explicitly political action can display the characteristics of social engagement, Lai describes the fight for political rights by Taixu and his Chinese student-monks in the 1930s and 1940s.[69] Taixu, as mentioned above, rejected the idea of the otherworldly monk, and described the authentic Buddhist monk as both socially and politically involved. He and his students' struggle was to protect the institutional and economic capital of Buddhism via political representation. He encouraged monks and nuns to vote, to be aware of current events, and even to run for office (although he later abandoned this proposal under tremendous pressure from other, especially lay, Buddhists).[70] The end goal was to achieve a Buddhism that performs good action and serves the people. In fact, political action itself was considered a form of public service proper to monks.

In her study of the emergence and impact of modern educational institutions in Chinese Buddhism, Lai argues that the "student-monk" served as an ideal image of the modern monastic career for China's young and progressive monks in the twentieth century. According to this ideal, student-monks were educated in both religious and secular knowledge, had a rational and "scientific" approach to religion, were sensitive to contemporary issues in Chinese society, and shared a vision for modern China in which Buddhism

[67] The model for this reconfiguration was pragmatic, although heavily influenced by Christianity (Goossaert and Palmer 2011).

[68] Ibid., p. 58.

[69] Lai 2013.

[70] Pittman 2001, p. 189. Taixu originally proposed the establishment of a Buddhist political party. He founded the journal, *Juequn zhoubao* 覺群週報, in 1946 to promote that idea (Lai 2013, p. 232).

would play an active role in society. In addition, student-monks in the early twentieth century were both nationalistic and revivalist. They appropriated not only nationalist discourses in justifying a more engaged role in secular matters, but also the symbolic authority of leading reformist monks, such as Taixu, to legitimate their movement.

Their modernization project aimed not only at ensuring the survival of Buddhism, but also at negotiating a place for Buddhism vis-à-vis the state in the newly founded republic. In fact, the Buddhist response to the state's changing attitude and policies towards religion during this period can be seen as a typical example of resistance to secularism. In emphasizing the vital role of Buddhism in the nation's pursuit of public morality, for example, the monk Renshan 仁山 (1887–1951) insisted on the Buddhist ideal of compassion. He argued that although China needed to educate its people in citizenship in order to realize republicanism, the rise of citizenship would not be possible unless the Buddhist ideal of compassion flourished among the people.[71] Here we see that Renshan did not hesitate to appropriate national discourse in formulating an engaged Buddhist identity. In reconciling their Buddhist identity with that of the nation, Chinese Buddhists not only viewed religion as an indispensable component in the formation of the nation, but also asserted a national identity deeply rooted in Buddhism.

Survival of their religion aside, these reformers were genuinely convinced that active participation in every aspect of the society was *the* way to perfect their bodhisattva path. In actively seeking equal citizenship, they were confronted with the stereotypical notion of the *sangha* being "outside of this world" (*fangwai* 方外). One of the intriguing characteristics of student-monks' writing during this period is how skilled they were in both the language of modernity and the doctrine of Buddhism. This allowed them to formulate a soteriology, utilizing the language and symbols popularized by the state, which was firmly grounded in Mahayana teachings. In stressing the importance of the bodhisattva spirit of not abandoning sentient beings in this world, and the skilful means to sacrifice one's own interest to accomplish what was beneficial to the welfare of sentient beings, they put forward the student-monk as eminently suited to selfless dedication to the welfare of all in the nation. Therefore, participation in social welfare, politics, and military actions for the defense of the nation during the war was subsumed within the duty of a modern-day bodhisattva.[72]

[71] Lai 2013, p. 64.
[72] Ibid., pp. 219–23.

Criteria for Exclusion: Social Action as Buddhist Practice

If any Buddhist group active in the secular sphere, whether in civil society or politics, is to be included in the category of socially engaged, then the category itself will become vague and unwieldy. To retain its analytical sharpness, then, additional criteria must be introduced. For scholarship of socially engaged Buddhism to date, this criterion has been nonviolence. We suggest, by contrast, that this criterion be a specific mode of moral reasoning. For a group to be socially engaged, it must argue that social, public, or political action is Buddhist in nature. This means that not all engaged Buddhists are pacifists by definition but that, in terms of history, most of them have been pacifist since the end of War World II. Engaged Buddhists can trace their influences to the peace movements of the early postwar period and globalizing traditions of nonviolent resistance. The historical shift from the prewar to postwar period affects certain political ideas within engaged groups, but not the underlying resistance to secularism and a description of social action itself as Buddhist practice. Here, we present an example of an engaged faction within a conservative, established (and, at the time, war-supporting) Japanese Buddhist school: the Ōtani-ha branch of Shin Buddhism.

Main argues that the priest Takeuchi Ryō'on, from the Ōtani-ha, was an engaged Buddhist typical of his time and context.[73] He worked as a mid-level priest-bureaucrat within a large, established, and conservative sect, and managed that sect's social engagement. From the 1920s to the 1950s, Takeuchi developed policies to address contemporary social issues, particularly discrimination against *burakumin* 部落民,[74] and created a program of social work designed to alleviate what he saw as the causes and effects of those issues. In concrete terms, he was involved with a wide variety of centralized and systematized sectarian programs that brought people together for the purposes of outreach, vocational training, education, and poverty alleviation. Takeuchi's department oversaw everything from early childhood education, youth groups, seniors' groups, womens' and mens' groups, Sunday schools, lifestyle improvement, vocational training for men and women (which included sewing, flower cultivation, and the tea ceremony). He organized the training of Shin priests and others as social workers and the "settlement-for-life" of temple priests in *burakumin* communities. The Ōtani-ha encouraged and funded the creation of co-operatives, places of free lodging, and medical dispensaries. A major focus here for Takeuchi

[73] Main 2012.
[74] Ibid.

was programs for the care and welfare of infants, children, boys and girls, women and mothers, and former prisoners. Shin social workers, themselves organized in a network, sought to create regional sub-networks to aid in improvement activities and, through this network, to aid in dispute resolution and mediation.[75] In Takeuchi's view, the Shin Buddhist social worker must stand between the vulnerable and those in power and constantly work to create a better society.

In Japanese scholarship, phrases like "society-creating Buddhism" (*shakai o tsukuru bukkyō* 社会を作る仏教) and "socially participating Buddhism" (*shakai sanka bukkyō* 社会参加仏教) are used for social engagement.[76] In a similar way, Takeuchi referred to Shin Buddhism's "social meaning" (*shakai teki igi* 社会的意義) and its activities "for the sake of society" (*shakai no tame* 社会の為). He exhibited the kind of moral reasoning that we believe to be common to socially engaged Buddhists: he argued that "benefitting others" (*rita* 利他) in society was "*none other than the goal itself*."[77] He asserted that modern social work was none other than the "true transmission" (*tadashii senpu* 正しい宣布) of Shin Buddhist teachings,[78] and by "transmission of the teachings" (*kyōgi o senden* 教義を宣伝) Takeuchi meant "precisely to sympathize well with the sufferings of people, know them, and create institutions (*shisetsu* 施設) to respond to them."[79] It is not the case for Takeuchi that Buddhist practice was somehow separate from social work. "Shin Buddhist social work *must be learned in the doing*."[80] Using Shin ethical language, Takeuchi expressed this learning-by-doing as the Shin ideal of a true companion (*dōbō* 同朋) who acts out of gratitude. The true companion of "the poor and oppressed" learns to be a companion "*by having that very goal*"[81] of performing social work for the poor and oppressed. In this way, Takeuchi equated Shin social work with the mode of being of the ideal Shin practitioner: a life of continuous gratitude. The upshot of his writings on social action is that, in the end, authentic, good Shin Buddhists *must be social workers*.

It is important to distinguish this from merely altruistic or other-benefitting modes of moral reasoning. In addition to the often-encountered

[75] Main 2013, pp. 233–34.
[76] Ama 2003, Mukhopadhyaya 2005.
[77] Takeuchi 1976, p. 15.
[78] Ibid., pp. 264–65.
[79] Ibid., p. 17.
[80] Ibid., p. 18.
[81] Ibid.

Buddhist critique of the implicit hierarchy between the one who acts benevolently and the one who receives benevolence, socially engaged reasoning recognizes action as moral only when it changes the nature of the social relations and situations that cause the other to experience pain, privation, and exclusion. From early in the twentieth century, this has meant systematic solutions and broad reform to properly address social problems.

Current definitions of social engagement cannot account for priest-bureaucrats like Takeuchi Ryō'on. The groups he founded and worked within were neither new, nor independent, nor anti-establishment. Ideologically, too, Takeuchi is difficult to place. He was nationalistic, loyal to the emperor, and supported both the war effort[82] and national public health campaigns of a fascist nature.[83] But he was also deeply sympathetic and supportive of left-wing, Marxist liberation movements for marginalized groups, such as *burakumin* and Korean residents of Japan. He spoke out against systemic discrimination against women and children, and much of his moral vision for the Ōtani branch was radically egalitarian. One of his followers inside the sect institution, Asano Onchi 朝野温知 (1906–1982, also known as Yi Su-ryong 李壽龍), remembers how his appearance confounded those who wanted to place him in an ideological box. Takeuchi, "that old friend of the *buraku* liberation movement, tall in stature, hair swept back, a wide forehead, and large eyes," dressed like an old right-wing conservative in his worn-out traditional clothing. Yet, according to Asano, on the inside Takeuchi was very progressive.[84]

Takeuchi believed that the Ōtani branch should position itself between political ideologies to advance social goals, but not against the ruling establishment. He believed the sect ought to support the state, as he himself did. For him, social problems were a shared, rather than individual, responsibility and they required social, systematic solutions. Like other socially engaged Buddhists, he developed a critique of individual, charitable or altruistic

[82] Although he considered war a horrible form of human suffering, he supported comfort missions to bereaved families, war memorials, mobilization of sect resources for the war effort, and colonial migration. Morality, for Takeuchi, was to strive in the midst of corruption, violence, and human evil—since there could only be greater or lesser degrees of evil, never an absence of it.

[83] Takeuchi, whose work in the 1930s and early 1940s accorded with state projects to segregate Hansen's disease sufferers, manage colonial holdings, and support the war is certainly vulnerable to critique. In particular, his activities connected to leprosy have been harshly criticized since the repeal of laws mandating the quarantine of leprosy patients in 1996.

[84] Asano 1988, p. 236.

action,[85] as well as a critique of "disengagement" in the institutional history of Buddhism. Takeuchi may have been quirky and driven, but he was not a charismatic leader of a new group as such. Charisma was located elsewhere, in the founder-exemplar, Shinran, not in the priest-bureaucrat, Takeuchi.

Concluding Remarks: Social Engagement Then and Now

What engaged Buddhists share is a rejection of any delineation of a secular sphere that excludes Buddhism, regardless of who attempts to create or enforce that sphere. Social action that does not accept a boundary between the religious and the secular always takes up a position with respect to the nation-state and its politics. In this light, the tendency for postwar engaged Buddhist groups to be anti-establishment and apolitical is a result of increasing secularism[86] and new geopolitical realities for religious organizations; it is not an innate orientation of socially engaged Buddhism. Transnational action in the postwar context increasingly demands a "non-governmental" and "apolitical" positioning—although a resistance to private religion remains strong (see Huang's contribution to this issue). Politically speaking, if we set aside a few significant exceptions in mainland Southeast Asia and Taiwan, Buddhism has been pushed out, has lost moral capital, has been suppressed or persecuted in significant ways throughout Asia, and remains a marginal minority in the West.

Existing scholarly definitions emphasize the postwar period, but it is clear to us that both earlier and later twentieth century groups and leaders should be included. In the cases of Japan and China, the first socially engaged Buddhists appeared very early, during the first two decades of the twentieth century. We expect a roughly contemporaneous emergence in other parts of Asia. To be clear, and despite the examples that we have given, we are not arguing for any particular ideological framework, whether conservative or progressive, nationalistic or cosmopolitan, only that the analytic category

[85] The critique of charity is interesting in the sense that while the approach to action has been reimagined, the relationship of donor and recipient reconsidered, the actual action of passing food, clothing, shelter, and care from one pair of hands to another has not. For a very recent version of this critique of paternalistic charity, see Birnbaum 2009.

[86] Ji, although critical of Zhao's formulations, agrees that secularization has increased: "Finally, serving political power constitutes an open assent to the state's appropriation of Buddhism's symbolic resources. It exacerbates the secularization of Buddhism in a way that is, no doubt, different from the violent deprivation and devastation of Buddhist properties during the pre-Reform era, but that still results in a desacralization of the religion and a loss of control of the Buddhist establishment's own resources" (p. 48, below).

of "socially engaged Buddhism" ought to include those frameworks when they have certain features. Asserting that all socially engaged groups must be pacifist is the equivalent of a scholar of American religions stating that Christian social engagement only exists on the political left but not the political right. As well, our revised definition makes it easier to consider older, established, sectarian organizations and sub-groups as potential locations of social engagement. This reminds us that large Buddhist groups can be heterogeneous, containing factions that advocate engagement, even if the group as a whole displays other orientations. In Main's view, the large Shin Buddhist sects in Japan display precisely this kind of heterogeneity.[87]

In sum, we recommend that scholars use "socially engaged" as a label for any Buddhist group, or faction within a larger group, where there is an erasure of boundaries that separate Buddhist belief, practice, and organizational life from activities considered morally relevant to modern secular society and its governance. It is properly found wherever Buddhism *qua* Buddhism is consciously linked to the political functions of the nation-state or its public sector tasks: such as education, healthcare, counseling, relief, and so on. However laudable, being morally upright alone does not make one socially engaged. With this new definition in mind, both the younger and the elder Nhat Hanh, both early twentieth century Buddhist reformers and late twentieth century Buddhist anti-nuclear activists, have the potential to be socially engaged. To close this essay, let us present brief summaries of the essays contributed to this volume by Ji, Huang, Watts on Hakamata, and Goldberg.

Ji Zhe, in his essay, "Zhao Puchu and His Renjian Buddhism," looks at the controversial figure Zhao Puchu (1907–2000), who was one of the most important figures in the state-sanctioned Buddhist Association of China (BAC) in post-Mao China. Zhao, in his role as president of the BAC, re-invented "Buddhism for the human [world]" (*renjian fojiao*) for a socialist China. First, Ji argues that the so-called *renjian fojiao* in socialist China bears little resemblance to Taixu's vision. Second, in the 1970s and 1980s, *renjian fojiao* was given a Marxist, against its earlier nationalist, meaning. *Renjian* Buddhism came to mean the production of a socialist utopia, a Marxist "pure land on earth," under the benevolent guidance of the Communist Party's policies on religion.[88] For Ji, as for Queen, without distance from, and criticism of, the state, a Buddhist movement cannot be counted as socially engaged. The issue for Ji is manifold: Zhao's Buddhism is not "autonomous"

[87] Main 2012.
[88] Ji, p. 38, below.

and free of state control, it lacks an ideology supporting "peace, justice, and freedom," and denouncing political oppression.[89] Ji's reticence to label Zhao engaged, however, also has a structural dimension which deserves attention. He shows how, despite similarities in form, the same concrete recommendations by both Taixu and Zhao served radically different purposes because of their deployment in different social contexts. Taixu makes his recommendations to achieve the advance of Buddhism into all areas of social and political life, while Zhao makes his to conform Buddhism to the state so that it could provide political legitimacy.[90] The crux of the issue is that one cannot fight political oppression as part of a political system, and if fighting oppression is essential to social engagement, groups that are imbricated with the state cannot be engaged.[91] However, Zhao's "three excellent traditions" of agricultural labor, academic study, and international diplomatic exchange,[92] because they elaborate concrete and specific actions that Buddhists ought to undertake, and because these traditions are "the most important" or "only" substance of Buddhism for Zhao, make a case for viewing him as engaged. Indeed, we see socialism as an easy fit with the moral narrative of social engagement: both view society as fundamentally unjust, in need of revolutionary change, and oriented towards a utopian ideal. Yet, Ji argues that the deep connections between Zhao's "three excellent traditions" and Communist Party policy make it impossible to see him as socially engaged.

Julia Huang, setting aside the question of who is and who is not socially engaged, turns her attention to the way in which certain groups exist and function. Drawing on studies of social network formation and trust,[93] Huang suggests the term "spiritual capital" as a way to understand the conditions for the arising and functioning of a transnational socially engaged Buddhist movement, the Ciji (Tzu Chi), especially in terms of its New York and Malacca branches.[94] Spiritual capital "refers to assets in religion-facilitated social networks" which are maintained by symbols as well as pragmatic resources.[95] In "Buddhism and its Trust Networks between Taiwan, Malaysia, and the United States," she sheds light on the dynamic process in which

[89] Ji, p. 48, below.
[90] Ibid., p. 44.
[91] Ibid., p. 50.
[92] Ibid., p. 41.
[93] Huang, p. 60, below.
[94] Ibid., pp. 59–62.
[95] Ibid., p. 61.

spiritual capital, in the form of trust networks, is created and circulated transnationally.

The Buddhist Ciji Foundation is very active in the areas of healthcare and disaster relief. Ciji is able to be active, Huang asserts, because it is a religion, and so possesses "spiritual capital," such that it fosters trust networks both locally and translocally. For Ciji, this represents "an ongoing process of transforming an ethnic religious association into both localized community service and an international nongovernmental organization (NGO) that are not limited by ethnic boundaries."[96] In other words, these networks are necessary to mobilize and motivate Ciji members for social action, whether it is fundraising for a new hospital or organizing material and human resources for earthquake relief. Through her case studies of members in what she calls the Ciji "diaspora" in Malaysia and New York, Huang argues that Ciji has successfully created a new "homeland" of religious identity in Taiwan in lieu of the traditional cultural homeland in mainland China. In her essay, Huang demonstrates that social engagement in Ciji is actually built atop "traditional" or "interior" Buddhist practices.[97] If true for other groups, her work suggests a model for understanding how traditional practices, normally criticized as disengaged, can potentially undergird social engagement. Huang further indicates that the growth of Ciji networks is strong where trust in traditional Buddhist practices and networks has declined.[98] And last, it deserves mention that for those movements or individuals that attempt to act transnationally within the secular sphere of a state which is not their own, whether Ciji volunteers in Sichuan or engaged pilgrims at Bodhgayā, an apolitical stance is necessary for action.

Jonathan Watts introduces and translates an essay by Hakamata Shun'ei 袴田俊英 (b. 1958) entitled, "From a Disconnected Society to an Interconnected Society." This essay is a socially engaged Buddhist treatment of the domestic Japanese problem of suicide and "dying alone" (Jp. *koritsu shi* 孤立死), providing a typical socially engaged analysis of social problems as having widespread and structural causes. Further, Watts's introduction by describing the way in which Hakamata and other socially engaged Buddhists created organizations and practices, provides a typical example of the tendency to mobilize in organized and systematic ways to address social problems. Watts traces the emergence of this mobilization, which connects

[96] Huang, p. 63, below.
[97] Ibid., p. 71.
[98] Ibid., p. 75.

Buddhist priests who had been grappling with the problem as dispersed individuals. He notes in particular the role played by the International Buddhist Exchange Center (Kokusai Bukkyō Kōryū Sentā 国際仏教交流センター, Yokohama) in facilitating what is today known as the Association of Buddhist Priests Confronting Self-death and Suicide (Jishi, Jisatsu ni Mukiau Sōryo no Kai 自死・自殺に向き合う僧侶の会), an organization with forty-two priest and nun members as of March 2014. Referring to Buddhist priests in the postwar period as "deeply marginalized," Watts describes the association as "an extremely important shift for Buddhist priests and organizations in developing meaningful social roles in contemporary Japanese society."[99]

What is important here is that both Watts and Hakamata emphasize the way that systemic problems and systematic solutions are mutually related. In its earliest form, despite cooperative efforts in terms of letter-writing, emergency counseling, support networks, special memorials, and group sharing, Watts asserts that the association did not address the structural and social nature of suicide, nor did it have a vision of a "society without suicide."[100] It was the accumulated experience of member priests and nuns dealing with suicidal individuals in crisis that became the basis for understanding its structural causes and developing a vision of how society should change. Hakamata today understands suicide as one outcome of the "core issue of isolation"[101] in rural areas, a result of the concrete processes of capitalism, mechanization of agriculture, housing modernization, economic downturn and increasing debt, migrant labor, depopulation, aging, poverty, physical marginalization, and lack of access. Isolation can only be addressed via the "process of entanglement," purposefully creating connections, relationships, and bonds between people,[102] which local Buddhists have begun to do by making space for drop-in (Jp. *yottetamore* よってたもれ) afternoon and evening gatherings. Hakamata is optimistic that action on the basis of this structural understanding might have contributed to the measurable reduction of suicide in his hometown.

The last article in this special issue takes us from East to South Asia, and to a group of Buddhist practitioners not normally considered socially engaged. Kory Goldberg, in "Pilgrimage Re-oriented: Buddhist Discipline, Virtue, and Engagement in Bodhgayā," describes a new form of pilgrimage,

[99] Watts, p. 79, below.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., p. 84.
[102] Ibid., p. 94.

"socially engaged pilgrimage," that he observed during his fieldwork in Bihar. Although pilgrimage is usually seen as a religious journey that takes the pilgrim away from society to travel elsewhere—and as such, a disengaged religious practice—Goldberg explores the way that Buddhist pilgrims to Bodhgayā become engaged at the destination site, especially in the areas of health and education. He investigated field sites associated with the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), a transnational Buddhist group of the Kagyu school that runs several institutions at Bodhgayā, particularly focusing on their schools and clinics.[103] He interviewed a set of socially engaged pilgrims who had come to work with these institutions. He argues that attention to the activities of this subset of pilgrims is necessary for understanding contemporary Buddhist pilgrimage as a whole.

These engaged pilgrims view their charitable and other activities at Bodhgayā as integral to their practice as Buddhists and to the performance of pilgrimage itself. Goldberg traces the way that engaged pilgrims situate their social activity at Bodhgayā in the larger framework of Buddhist ethics and explores how they relate to local politics and development policy. The pilgrims Goldberg discusses are marginalized such that they cannot both criticize local or national politics and retain access to the site. This is much the same situation as Ciji volunteers, when they attempt to act transnationally in mainland China, for example. In both cases, the potential to lose access to the site of social activity makes political criticism difficult or impossible.

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[103] Goldberg, p. 97, below.

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